DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 682 SP 036 326

TITLE	Principles for Professional Development: AFT's Guidelines for Creating Professional Development Programs That Make a Difference.
INSTITUTION	American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	12p.
AVAILABLE FROM	American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20001-2079 (single copy free, $1 each for 5 or more).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Environment; *Educational Principles; Elementary School Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Development; *Inservice Teacher Education; Knowledge Base for Teaching; Knowledge Level; *Professional Continuing Education; Secondary School Teachers; *Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS	American*Federation of Teachers

ABSTRACT

Professional development for teachers is a continuous process of individual and collective examination of practice. This publication first identifies reasons why traditional staff development often fails and several prerequisites for effective professional development. These include establishing real stakes for students; providing incentives for teachers to take the risks inherent in changing practices; convincing educators that proposed changes are substantial and not merely fads; and implementing policies that create a foundation for a safe and orderly learning environment. Nine principles of effective professional development are then presented: (1) professional development should ensure depth of content knowledge; (2) it should provide a strong foundation in the pedagogy of particular disciplines; (3) it should provide more general knowledge about teaching and learning processes and about schools as institutions; (4) it should be rooted in and reflect the best available research; (5) it should contribute to measurable improvement in student achievement; (6) it expects teachers to be intellectually engaged with ideas and resources; (7) it provides sufficient time, support, and resources to enable teachers to master new content and pedagogy and to integrate these into their practice; (8) it should be designed by representatives of those who participate in it, in cooperation with experts in the field; and (9) it should take a variety of forms, including some not typically considered. (ND)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 389 682

Principles for Professional Development

AFT's guidelines for creating professional development programs that make a difference

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Kauth

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

S1037326

AFT Professional Development Guidelines

We are at a historic moment in American education. Efforts are under way across the country to establish rigorous student achievement standards and to formulate education policies that make realizing them possible. At the same time, new cognitive research suggests that teaching practice should be radically altered to treat all students more as apprentices who learn to know, think, and do—all at the same time.

Both sets of reforms will demand much more of teachers, including a deeper knowledge of subject matter, a better understanding of how students learn, the ability to make complex, impromptu decisions, and a commitment to working closely with colleagues to design rich learning activities and new assessments.

Without professional development, school reform will not happen. Professional development can no longer be viewed as a dispensable appendage that can be cut at will or an activity that can be isolated from the achievement of comprehensive or "systemic" reform. The nation can adopt rigorous standards, set forth a visionary scenario, compile the best research about how students learn, change the nature of textbooks and assessment, promote teaching strategies that have been successful with a wide range of students, and change all the other elements involved in systemic reform.

But, unless the classroom teacher understands and is committed to the plan and knows how to make it happen, the dream will come to naught. The magnitude of change sought demands a carefully crafted, well-supported professional development design.

Traditional staff development has failed. There are documented cases in which teachers set out to change what they did, believed they were making significant changes in practice, but, in fact, did not. There are also large numbers of teachers who make little effort to change because they consider "inservicing" worthless and don't know where else to turn for support. We believe these results most often occur when:

1) professional development experiences are not deep enough, or varied enough, or well-enough supported;

2) school policy and organization are at odds with new theory;

3) in some way, individual and/or collective concerns are ignored; and

4) the school or district accepts and promotes the latest "catch phrase" fad without fully understanding it and without considering its implications for teachers and students in daily and long-term contexts.

It is also clear, however, that other conditions must exist for even the best professional development to make an impact on students. No matter how hard teachers work or how perfected their strategies, student achievement does not improve unless students work hard. **A prerequisite for real improvement in student achievement is to establish real stakes for students.** Grade-to-grade promotion, graduation, college entrance, and access to jobs and good job training programs should be substantially influenced by students' achievement and effort in school. Consequences—and early assistance—also must be developed that have an impact on those young people who see no promise for themselves in college or jobs and who are often lured into dangerous or criminal activities that bring instant gratification.

A prerequisite for real improvement in student achievement is to establish real stakes for students.

A second prerequisite is the existence of incentives for teachers to risk the stages of uncertainty that surround the development of different practice. Incentives might include:

- the chance to be engaged with ideas and colleagues as part of the normal workday;
- the availability of clear and credible supports;
- opportunities to share expertise as teacher leaders, specialists, and mentors;
- opportunities to participate in professional activities outside the district;
- professional recognition; and/or
- financial rewards.

A third prerequisite is that educators must be convinced that any proposed change isn't just another fad. Otherwise, they will ignore it and wait for it to go away. So, it is important that the schools and school districts not only endorse change and innovation rhetorically, but that they make appropriate, long-term organizational accommodations to support the change. This does not mean an inflexible commitment to a path that is eventually found to be ineffective. But there must be an initial realistic view of how much

change any teacher can handle at once—combined with the kind of planning and sequencing that will enable teachers to make changes take hold.

It is also indisputable that no matter how knowledgeable teachers are, no matter how well planned their lessons and how good their skill in implementing such plans, student learning will be at risk without an orderly environment in schools. Both individual students and classes are adversely affected when surrounded by disorder or when a few out-of-control students are permitted to continually disrupt the many who are intent on learning. **A fourth prerequisite is that there be policies in place that create a foundation for a safe and orderly environment in which learning can be pursued without distraction.**

Other accommodations necessary to the successful implementation of new practice or organization also should be identified. Teachers and all school staff need, for example:

- clear standards for what students should know;
- opportunities to exchange classroom visits and collaborate on the lessons learned;
- the authority to change how time is allocated within a school day and year;
- alignment of the way student work is assessed with curriculum goals;
- a teacher and school evaluation plan that is supportive of change;
- existence of a reasonable plan for discipline and safety; and
- parent education and involvement programs.

It is also crucial that professional development for teachers be complemented by professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals and other school staff. Because the teacher/para team is such an important one, it will sometimes and under certain conditions make sense for professional development activities to include both groups together. Absent coordinated development opportunities for all, staff may find themselves at cross-purposes to the detriment of students.

It is crucial that professional development for teachers be complemented by professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals and other school staff.

Given these supportive and nonthreatening conditions, teachers should responsibly adjust practice based on sound evidence of what works.

However, making the change to reflective practice and to the different instructional roles that current knowledge suggests is not easy. For so long, teachers have been told what to think and what to do.

To make ongoing professional development more effective in the long run, we recommend that preservice courses prepare teachers to meet the standards being devised by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). This guide to what beginning teachers should know and be able to do outlines not only a solid foundation of content and pedagogy for beginning teachers but also sets standards for continuous reflection on practice and the continuous learning that is its result. Professional development should also help prepare new teachers who choose to eventually sit for the advanced certification offered by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

To assist in the establishment of effective professional development in every school district, the American Federation of Teachers has prepared the following set of guidelines. □

The Guidelines

Professional development is a continuous process of individual and collective examination of practice. It should empower individual educators and communities of educators to make complex decisions, identify and solve problems, and connect theory, practice, and student outcomes. It should also enable teachers to offer students the learning opportunities that will prepare them to meet world-class standards in given content areas and to successfully assume adult responsibilities for citizenship and work.

1. Professional development should ensure depth of content knowledge.

Why this is needed: Some argue that "teachers teach children, not content." What matters most, the argument goes, is a teacher's compassion for and understanding of his students, along with a good grasp of the child development field. Others argue that there is now so much knowledge that schools should focus primarily on teaching children how to find information instead of teaching them particular bodies of knowledge. They argue that "learning to learn" is enough.

We do not agree with either of these arguments. Knowledge of a common core of content—which we define as including the "various ways of knowing" that are intrinsic to each discipline—allows us to communicate, to work together toward common ends, to function as a cohesive democratic society, and to find common ground on which to build tolerance for our differences.

What it means: Since those who do not know content cannot teach it, a prime purpose of professional development must be deepening the content knowledge of teachers. There are times when teachers should be engaged in acquiring knowledge about the subject matter they teach, learning content for the sake of knowing the content. Sometimes additional content is learned in conjunction with developing pedagogical content knowledge. But the learning of content as a primary goal is a legitimate and necessary end of professional development.

2. Professional development should provide a strong foundation in the pedagogy of particular disciplines.

Why this is needed: While knowing the content you teach is critical, you must also know how to get students to understand it. Many people possess deep knowledge of the disciplines, but cannot convey that knowledge to others or engage them in ways that enable them to absorb it themselves. Conversely, it is possible to be master of specific techniques but not know when it is appropriate to use them to generate knowledge and understanding in a discipline.

What it means: While some pedagogical knowledge is applicable to the teaching of all subjects—for example, the need to teach procedures that help maintain order—most knowing and thinking is embedded in very specific content. People don't understand history in the same way they understand science. Having the ability to solve ⅛ x ¾ demonstrates content knowledge. Knowing how to use a drawing to help students understand why multiplying by a fraction makes a number smaller is knowledge of content-related pedagogy. Professional development should help teachers develop an understanding of:

- the most useful ways of representing the ideas of specific disciplines;
- the most powerful illustrations and analogies for representing a concept;
- what makes learning specific things in a content area easy or difficult;
- the kinds of questions that help to reveal and develop understanding; and
- the most effective strategies to address the misconceptions that commonly arise with regard to particular content at particular developmental levels, given students with specific background experiences and prior knowledge.

While knowing the content you teach is critical, you must also know how to get students to understand it.

No single pedagogy fits all disciplines and topics equally well. This should be particularly taken into account when "integrated" or "interdisciplinary" teaching is planned. It is important that the core concepts and knowledge of the underlying disciplines be addressed in powerful and not simply superficial ways. It is not sufficient, for example, to have students identify the flora in a particular region that is the focus of an interdisciplinary unit when they ought to be actively investigating the principles of plant growth and how climate and geography modify plant structure.

3. In addition to content and pedagogical content knowledge, professional development should provide more general knowledge about the teaching and learning processes and about schools as institutions.

Why this is needed: Not only do teachers need content knowledge and discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge, they also need general knowledge about teaching and learning processes. Since learning cannot take place in chaos, they must know how to manage a classroom full of youngsters.

Knowledge about how schools work as institutions provides another necessary resource for school staffs, as more and more decisions shift to school sites. Even the best intentions and the most able teachers may not succeed if placed in a school structure or culture that is in conflict with their goals. Furthermore, the professional teacher who has knowledge of what is necessary for successful teaching and learning should be able to help shape the school environment and culture.

What it means: In addition to the topics cited above, professional development

should provide research-based and practice-related knowledge about:

- creating and maintaining appropriate, orderly teaching and learning environments;
- curriculum and assessment issues;
- how schools function as institutions; and
- how cultures that support reflective and research-based practice can be built and supported.

4. Effective professional development is rooted in and reflects the best available research.

Why this is needed: No other profession ignores its proven knowledge base. Research is available and is constantly developing new knowledge in all the areas we have cited. For too long, educators have been prone to make instructional decisions with no more basis than tradition or feelings. The profession must apply research-based knowledge if it is to prepare the current and coming generations of students for the future. Not only must schools and school districts tap this research in shaping their professional development programs, but good learning theory should also be applied to the delivery of these programs.

What it means: Significant changes of practice should not be instituted on the basis of unfounded preferences or because a particular idea is publicized in education or other circles. Practice should be examined and change considered on the basis of sound research to which professionals have access, and which the practicing professional can then use to make decisions. All learners learn best when provided with models and examples and not theory alone. Therefore, when professional development itself models the kinds of strategies that research finds effective for learning, the ability of teachers to implement those strategies in class is strengthened.

For too long, educators have been prone to make instructional decisions with no more basis than tradition or feelings.

5. Professional development should contribute to measurable improvement in student achievement.

Why this is needed: Higher student achievement is our central goal. Much past professional development has not produced changes in practice that resulted in improved student performance. The public and its representatives rightly expect the public schools to meet the challenges of educating the nation's children.

What it means: Professional development must be powerful enough to result in changes in schools and practice that lead to higher student achievement on measures acceptable both to the public and to the profession. But the caveats of our opening section still hold. Designs for assessing the impact of professional development on students must account for the students' share of the work. Student effort must complement good teaching to produce results.

Student achievement is not the only relevant measurable outcome. So is teacher practice itself. There are practices that have been found to make a difference in student achievement. Professional development should enable teachers to use these practices effectively. Many of these are contained in the standards for highly accomplished teachers developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Thus, professional development that enables increasing numbers of teachers to gain advanced certification or that helps the majority of teachers come closer to meeting those standards is on the right track toward raising student achievement.

6. Effective professional development expects teachers to be intellectually engaged with ideas and resources.

Why this is needed: Teachers want to be responsible professionals who deliver the best possible education for their students. Yet they are often excluded from the decision-making processes regarding policies, programs, or methodologies. "Theirs is not to reason why" is too pervasive a point of view about teachers among decision-makers. This attitude results in inservice that is not only ineffective but also demeaning. Failure to recognize the professional capacity and needs of teachers also leads to inservice that tries to "program" teachers but fails to prepare them to grapple with meaning and with the complex problems they will encounter in the many unpredictable situations that arise. Such inservice will not empower teachers to apply well what is known about teaching and learning.

What it means: Teachers face an increasingly diverse group of students—and do so with the knowledge that there is no one way of teaching and learning that will be best for all of them. Professional development that is highly prescriptive about what teachers should do and say or that presents them with rigid activities or overly detailed lessons does not generate the understanding and creativity necessary to enable them to deal with unexpected responses or with the varied backgrounds of students. Good professional development, in contrast, engages teachers in thinking about tough issues and difficult content, in learning with and from colleagues, and in using the resources they will need to use with these students.

Professional development does not occur in an isolated moment in time. It is not an event, it is a process.

7. Effective professional development provides sufficient time, support, and resources to enable teachers to master new content and pedagogy and to integrate these into their practice.

Why this is needed: Professional development does not occur in an isolated moment in time. *It is not an event, it is a process.* Expertise grows over time as teachers reflect on and use ideas and strategies in the classroom, as they clarify their understanding, and as they wrestle with whether they are applying new knowledge appropriately. Professional development requires the support of colleagues and administration, including opportunities to see how others interpret and apply such knowledge. All of this takes time.

What it means: Sufficient time takes on four meanings here:

- First, understanding theory and application, content knowledge, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment all take time, especially when new knowledge is constantly developing in all these areas. Enough formal learning time needs to be allotted to allow this understanding to develop.
- Second, if teachers are to integrate their new-found knowledge and skills into classroom practice, and if schools are to function as cohesive institutions, time should be provided for reflective meetings, networking, and observing models in action.
- Third, time must be taken to provide supportive, non-threatening feedback about teachers' application of new knowledge.

- Last, teachers need a chance to discuss and question as and *after* they try new methods.

Essential time should be built into a teacher's workday.

8. Professional development should be designed by representatives of those who participate in it, in cooperation with experts in the field.

Why this is needed: When participants in professional development are not involved in its planning, they frequently end up feeling alienated and distrustful, and they sit through sessions that will not make a difference in their teaching. Such a situation wastes both time and money. Their cynicism is magnified by the failure of most such experiences to take into account the realities of the classroom and the differences in teacher experiences. Credibility is also compromised when representatives of teachers are brought in to rubber stamp what someone else has already designed and when these representatives are such a small fraction of the planning group that they clearly can exert no influence.

What it means: It is important that practitioners be centrally involved in formulating professional development plans and that they "buy in" to the process. Since not every single professional can be part of the planning group, professionals should choose who represents them. Representation should be great enough to exert influence, but the process must ensure the incorporation of ideas that come from beyond the schoolhouse. Otherwise what is already in place may merely be renamed and reinforced.

Not only should there be variety within and among professional development courses, but professional development should also extend beyond formal coursework.

9. Professional development ought to take a variety of forms, including some we have not typically considered.

Why this is needed: There are a variety of ways in which people learn. There are a variety of experiences that are necessary to clarify, connect, solidify, and develop knowledge. For professional development to be complete, all these aspects should be addressed.

What it means: Not only should there be variety within and among professional development courses, but professional development should also extend beyond formal coursework. So long as the components addressed in the preceding criteria are met, rich professional development can occur while educators are networking and participating in collaboratives, in standards development, curriculum and assessment work, conducting research, or while they are engaging in the rigorous advanced certification process of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Preparation for certification by the NBPTS is an excellent form of professional development, as many who have attempted certification will attest. When there are clearly articulated, high standards for student achievement and when conversations take place about how to help students reach them, professional development is taking place, whatever the formal or informal mechanisms that enable this to happen. The very organization of the school should promote and provide for continuous and serious reflection about what students are learning and what needs to be done to continually improve.

* * *

For more information or to comment on these guidelines, contact Alice Gill in the AFT Educational Issues Department, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

DESIGN: BORNSTEIN ASSOCIATES

AFT Professional Development Guidelines

Summary

Professional development is a continuous process of individual and collective examination of practice. It should empower individual educators and communities of educators to make complex decisions, identify and solve problems, and connect theory, practice, and student outcomes. It should also enable teachers to offer students the learning opportunities that will prepare them to meet world-class standards in given content areas and to successfully assume adult responsibilities for citizenship and work.

1. Professional development should ensure depth of content knowledge.

2. Professional development should provide a strong foundation in the pedagogy of particular disciplines.

3. In addition to content and pedagogical content knowledge, professional development should provide more general knowledge about the teaching and learning processes and about schools as institutions.

4. Effective professional development is rooted in and reflects the best available research.

5. Professional development should contribute to measurable improvement in student achievement.

6. Effective professional development expects teachers to be intellectually engaged with ideas and resources.

7. Effective professional development provides sufficient time, support, and resources to enable teachers to master new content and pedagogy and to integrate these into their practice.

8. Professional development should be designed by representatives of those who participate in it, in cooperation with experts in the field.

9. Professional development ought to take a variety of forms, including some we have not typically considered.

555 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20001-2079

ASK FOR ITEM NO. 176
SINGLE COPY FREE / $1 EACH FOR 5 OR MORE
7/95

BEST COPY AVAILABLE